



Girls' Leadership, Engagement, Agency, and Development (LEAD) Act

Reps. David Trone (D-MD) and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA)

Summary

The Girls LEAD Act is a bipartisan policy initiative that promotes girls' leadership and participation in civic and political processes through U.S. foreign assistance. It aims to improve the effectiveness of U.S.-led democracy and governance initiatives and to increase girls' ability to engage in decision-making processes affecting their lives and their communities. We are seeing the tremendous capacity of women leaders today in countries like Germany, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Iceland, where quick, strong, decisive actions and communication have enabled those countries to limit the spread of the coronavirus and resume normal economic activity with greater ease than we have seen elsewhere. From a young age, girls should be able to imagine themselves in those types of leadership roles.

The bill would establish U.S. policy to promote the empowerment of adolescent girls through programming designed to strengthen their participation in civic, political, and community activities. Adolescents who participate actively in their communities from early on are more likely to become engaged citizens and voters, with higher levels of ambition for future leadership positions. Their safe, meaningful, and appropriate participation in civic life is key to creating democratic societies with informed and engaged citizens.

Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are intricately linked to healthy democracies, sustainable development, and global stability. Despite comprising over 50 percent of the world's population, women are underrepresented at all levels of public-sector decision making. Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, and research suggests that gender balance in the political sphere promotes gender balance in the workforce, which could double global GDP growth by 2025.

What will this legislation do?

Specifically, the legislation would require the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to:

- Develop a united, comprehensive strategy on strengthening the participation of, in particular, adolescent girls in democracy, human rights, and governance;



- Prioritize foreign assistance funding made available for democracy, human rights and governance programs in accordance with this act; and
- Provide joint annual reporting to Congress on progress made by U.S. government agencies in support of this policy.

This bill is a companion to S.2766, introduced in the Senate by Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ben Cardin (D-MD). It is endorsed by Save the Children and ChildFund International, Vital Voices, The Hunger Project, National Association Social Workers, Oxfam America, Girl Determined, GirlForward, International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law, CARE USA, Church World Service, National Democratic Institute (NDI), Feed the Children.